

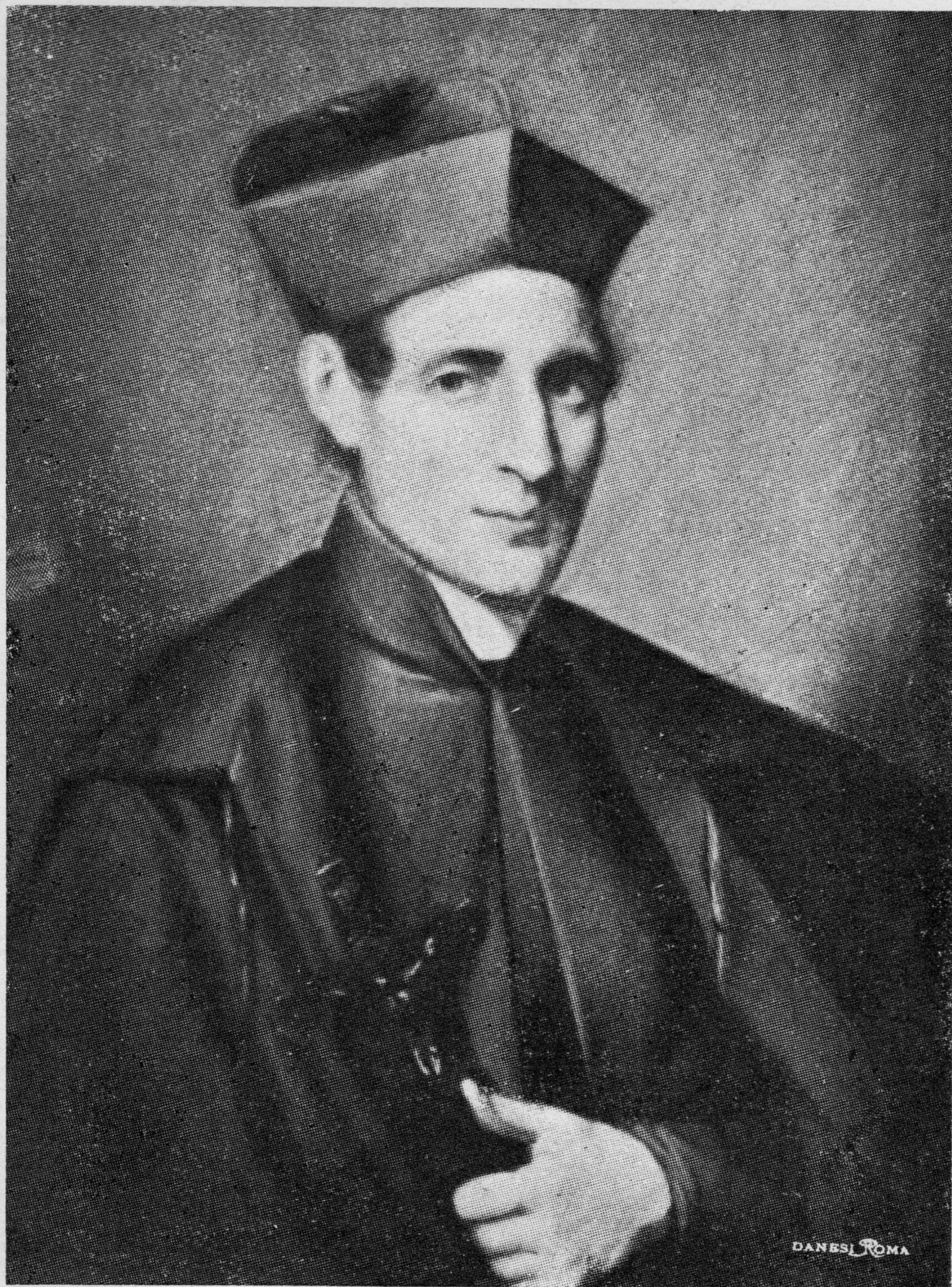
ALOYSIUS GENTILI

OF THE FATHERS OF CHARITY

BY

Dr. J. BOZZETTI

PROVOST GENERAL OF THE ORDER



MILAN

S. A. L. E. SODALITAS

Via Settembrini, 7

A Memoir
of
Father Aloysius Gentili
(of the Fathers of Charity)

Missionary in England and Ireland
in the early nineteenth Century

MILAN
S. A. L. E. SODALITAS
Via Settembrini, 7

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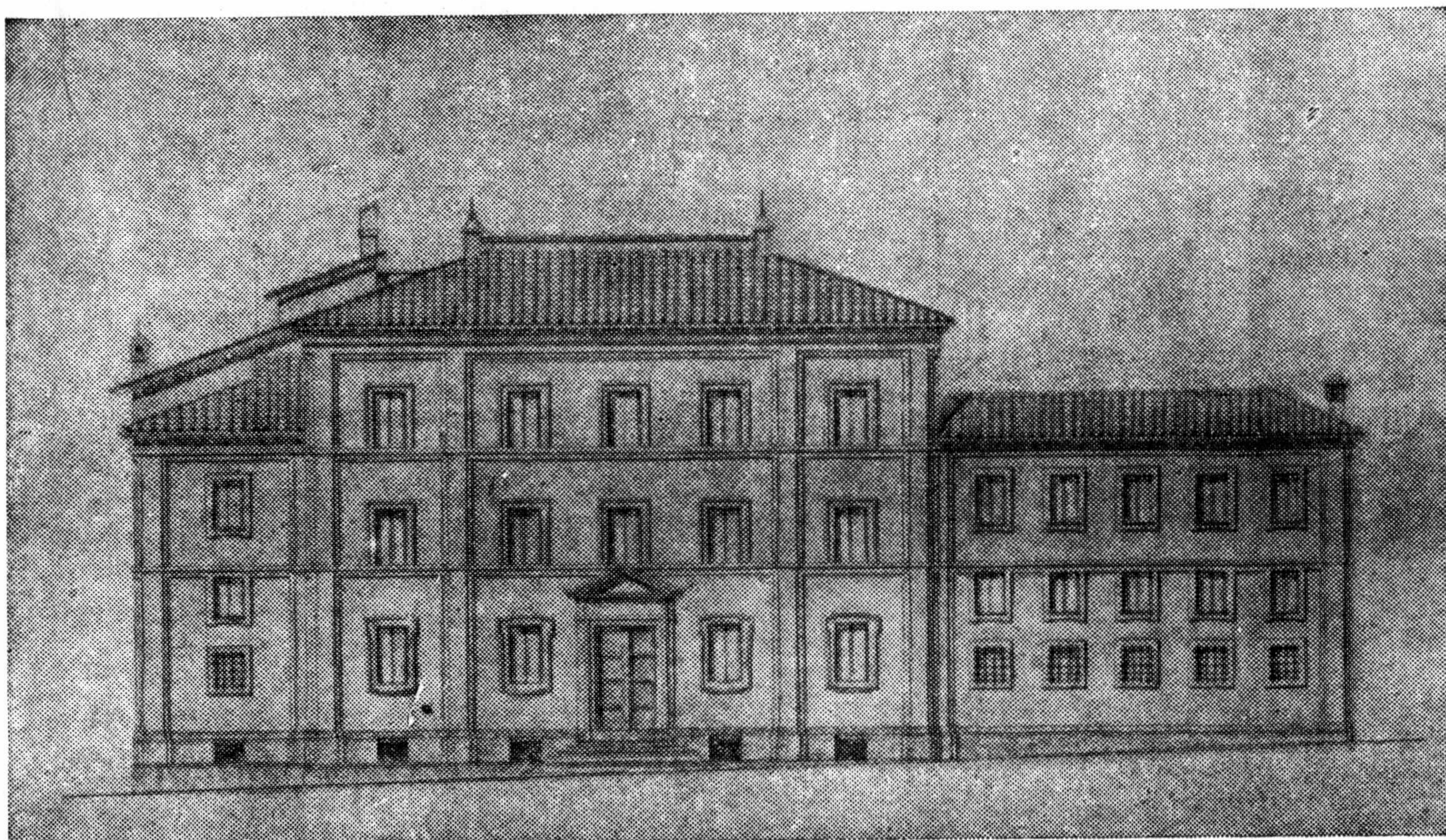
FOREWORD

Save for a few small additions, the present pamphlet is a reprint, from the Italian, of an article which appeared recently in the Vatican paper – the “ Osservatore Romano ”, – under the title: “ A Roman Missionary in England in the early Nineteenth Century ”.

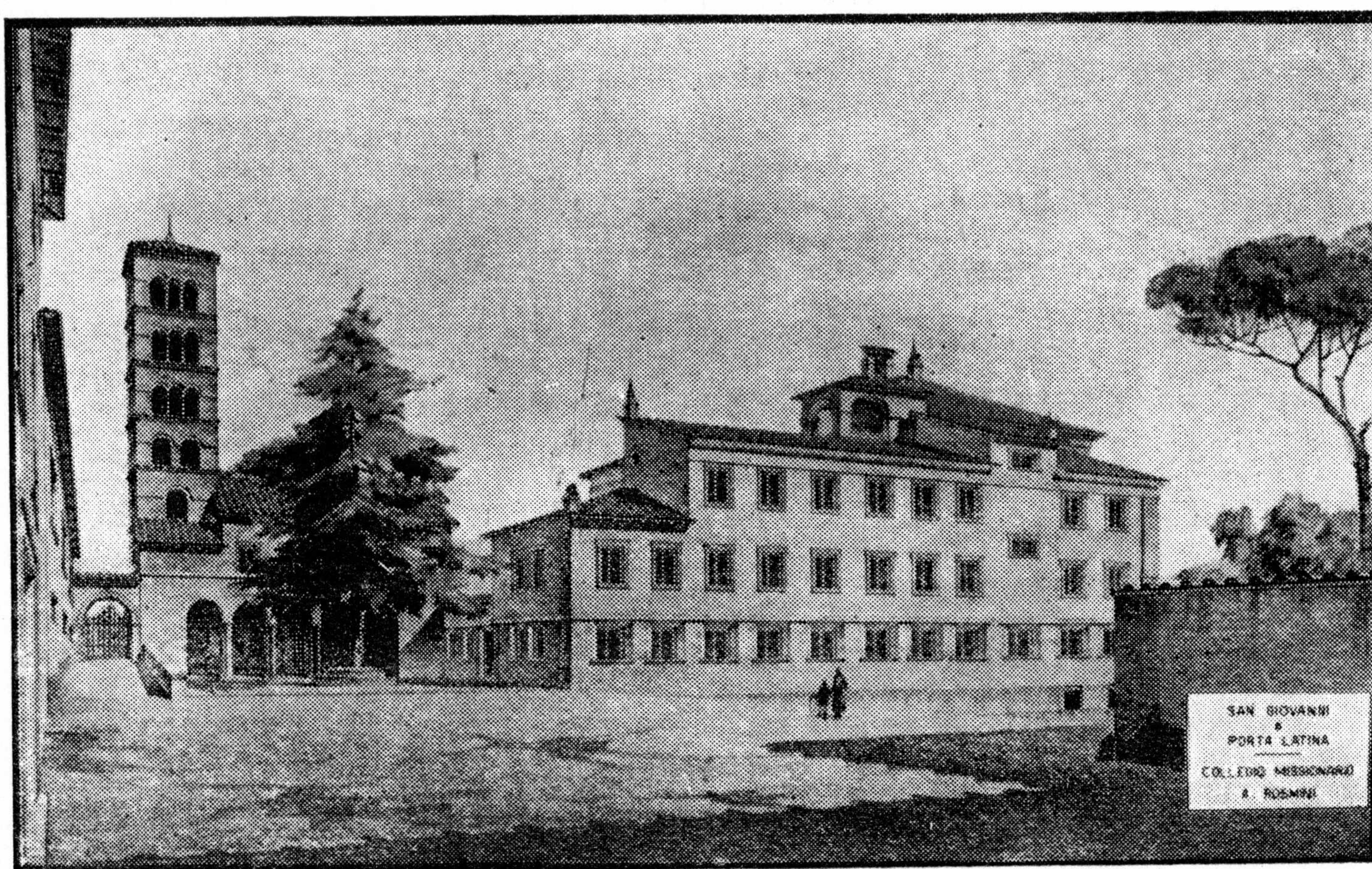
The article commemorated the centenary of the arrival in England of the spiritual sons of Rosmini, the founder of the Order of Charity. It is now reproduced in book-form, on the occasion of the Rosminians taking over their share of the work in the Foreign Mission fields, and of the foundation of the “ Antonio Rosmini ” Missionary College. This College was canonically erected by the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide, by a decree dated 29th May 1937. It stands close by the ancient church of St. John at the Latin Gate, the church from which, by happy omen, His Eminence Cardinal McRory, Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of all Ireland, takes his title.

The following memoir of an apostolic man, who in the name of Jesus Christ and in accordance with His words, laid down his life for his brethren, is especially dedicated to the Ascribed Members and to all the friends of the Institute of Charity.

May God grant that they may be stimulated thereby to cooperate, by all the means suggested by Christian Charity, in the new work which the Institute, trusting in God, is undertaking. Above all may their brotherly prayers be directed to the Holy Spirit, begging from Him, for the young missionaries of today, that gift of expansive and burning zeal, which shone so brightly in the life of Father Aloysius Gentili.



Front view of the Missionary College "Antonio Rosmini."



Left wing showing the church of St. John
at the Latin Gate.

A CENTENARY

About noon on the 16th June 1835 three travellers from Italy sailed up the Thames and arrived at London. They were missionaries and their superior was a Roman priest, Luigi Gentili. The late Dr. Casartelli, Bishop of Salford, in his "A Forgotten Chapter of the Second Spring" notes this arrival as a significant event in the revival of Catholicism in England.

The Oxford Movement had already begun: chosen souls born in the Anglican heresy were, under the inspiration of God, returning to the sacred traditions of the monk Augustine, who, sent by Gregory the Great, had brought Christianity to the Anglo-Saxon people. Meanwhile, Rome the great Mother was coming in search of her lost daughter.

The Emancipation Act of 1829 had removed the penal laws which forbade Catholic missionaries in England, and already new apostles were arriving, among whom the Venerable Dominic Bar-

bieri is outstanding. A worthy fellow-labourer of Fr. Dominic was this newly arrived Roman priest, who with the blessing of another Gregory – Gregory XVI – had come to renew the apostolate of Augustine.

AN APOSTLE

Gentili was endowed with all the gifts, internal and external, of an Apostle; magnanimity of soul, open to great ideals and capable of great sacrifices, intense love of God, a thirst for justice, a consuming zeal for the salvation of souls, deep piety, an alert mind, wide sympathy, commanding presence, and untiring energy. All these gifts made an appeal to the people both in England and in Ireland; drew crowds around him and won for him the esteem of men like Cardinals Wiseman and Newman, Archbishop Murray of Dublin, Bishops Ullathorne, Briggs, Brown and Moriarty, and many others, both of the clergy and the laity, who regarded him as a holy and extraordinary man.

Among the laity it is sufficient to mention Lucas, the first Editor of the well-known Catholic weekly 'The Tablet'. Lucas, whom Bishop Casartelli considered one of "the most intelligent observers of his day", declares that "the life of Dr. Gentili with his brethren, marks an era in the history of this corner of the Church", and in a long article of October 7th. 1848, he adds:

“ His unflinching honesty of purpose, his evident resolution to tell the whole truth, where necessary, however, or to whomsoever it might be harsh or unpalatable; the courage with which he faced mobs when they were wrong, as well as the prejudices of society, when he knew them to be pernicious or dangerous; the conviction which everyone felt, who heard him, that he was not playing a part, or trying to earn favour, or careful about losing favour or afraid of man's censure, or anxious for anything but to bring the truth home to the heart and conscience of his hearers; this, joined with the holiness of life which spoke in all his features and gestures, and was carried upon the very tones of his voice, gave him, in the pulpit, an influence such as we remember to have been enjoyed by no other preacher in this country ”.

And Dr. Redmond, Bishop of Killlaloë in Ireland, fifty years after Lucas, wrote:

“ My memory retains a very clear and vivid picture of the spare and emaciated figure, and grave and gentle face of the saintly man, and I almost think I hear the eloquent words uttered in his soft Italian accent, by which he won the heart of at least one among the attentive Irish crowd that had come to hear him. I shall be greatly delighted if the forthcoming Life is a preliminary to his beatification ”.

ROMANTIC YOUTH

Gentili was 34 years of age when he arrived in England. He had met Rosmini in Rome at a critical moment of his life, and now he had been a priest and a Rosminian for five years.

Vivacious and enterprising but impressionable and impulsive, Gentili had several times changed his profession. He had graduated in Canon and Civil Law at 21 years of age, and with the favour and influence of Cardinal Consalvi, the famous Secretary of State to Pius VII, at his disposal, a brilliant future seemed open before him. But the death of Consalvi put an end to his designs.

Gentili found consolation in applying himself strenuously to the acquisition of the principal modern languages, English, French and Spanish. In order to increase his accomplishments, he began also to cultivate a taste for music. Very speedily his personality and his gifts gained him an entry to the most exclusive international circles in Rome.

Elegant and gay, he was a very welcome guest at the receptions at the Embassies of France and Austria. Long after, when he was a missionary in England his aristocratic friends, hearing him spoken of as such, expressed their amazement; "Surely this cannot be that Luigi Gentili with whom we used to sing duets in Rome!"

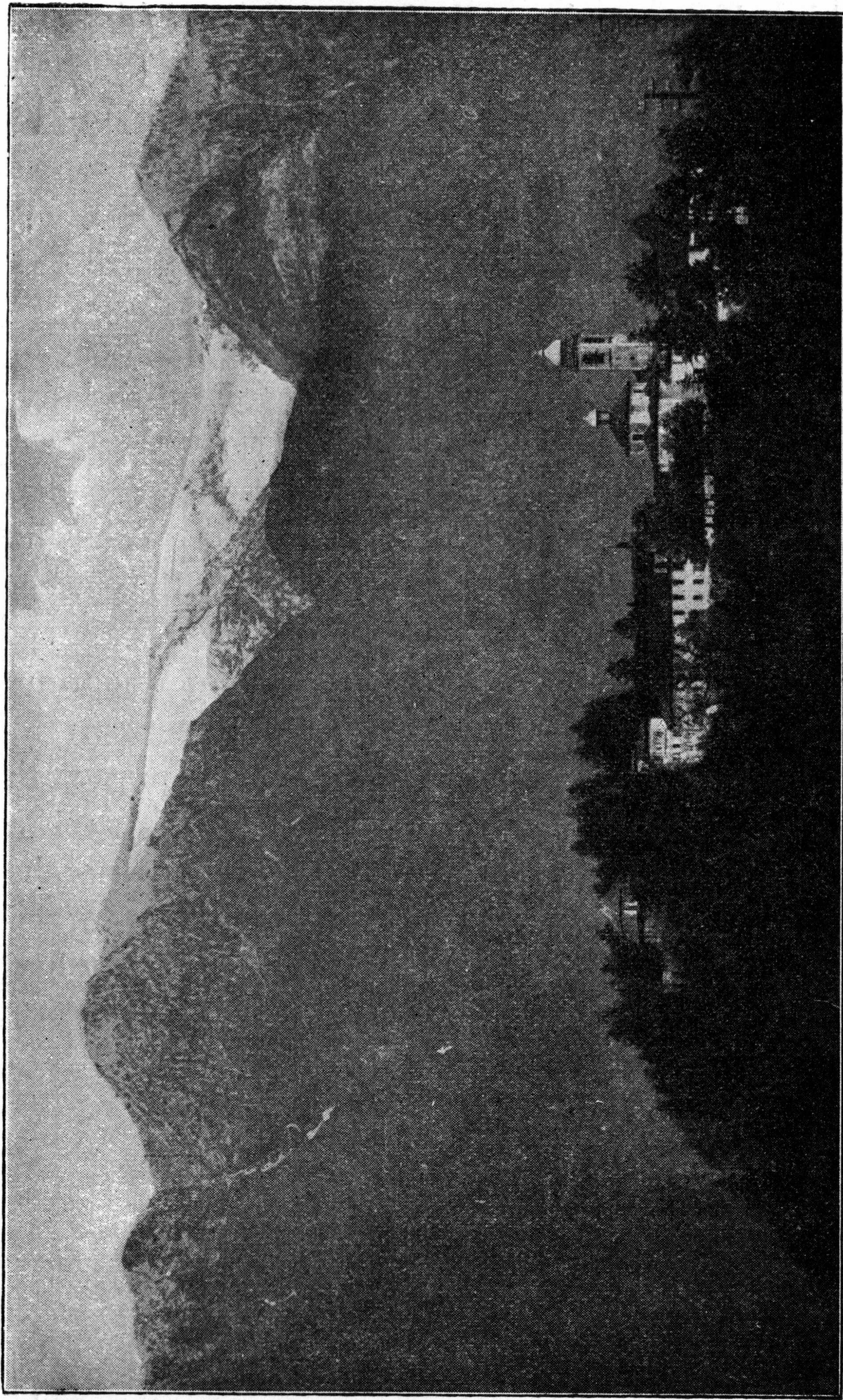
As he moved in this glittering company, one thing troubled the young lawyer, ever impressionable and fond of cutting a fine figure; he, the acquaintance of so many titled people, had himself no patent of nobility. He did not rest content until, through the good offices of his friend Duke Sforza Cesarini he obtained for himself the title (then of no small importance in Rome) of "Knight of the Golden Spur".

Gentili was so popular in the foreign circles of Rome that he was requested to give lessons in Italian. He consented to do so, at first gratuitously, especially to his English friends, but the success he met with induced him to become a professional teacher. At the end of two years, he found that the profits from his lessons amounted to two thousand scudi.

He invested this sum in landed property at Monte Mario, near the Vatican, and the idea of becoming a farmer suddenly took hold of him. Quitting the dalliance of Roman drawing-rooms, he

set himself to study agriculture, and, wishing to unite practice with theory, he bought a pair of oxen and followed the plough. But, as might have been expected his bodily strength was not equal to the unaccustomed labour and on contracting a fever, he was obliged to return to his books and the teaching of languages.

Here a touch of romance enters into the story of his life: he falls in love with a young English lady, to whom he was teaching Italian. Miss Mendoza, wealthy and with an attractive and pleasing disposition, seemed to him an ideal wife. Soon he felt sure of her love, and behaving with perfect honesty, — for despite his inconstancy he was always a gentleman and a good Christian, — in due time he asked her English guardian for his consent to the marriage. A knight of the Golden Spur, with property at Monte Mario, he did not think himself a man to be slighted. But to his great surprise he received a flat refusal. Nothing daunted he returned to the charge, only to find that the young lady had been spirited away to England.



Mount Calvary, Domodossola.

SPIRITUAL FORMATION

He woke up from his dream to find himself lonely, depressed and disheartened. He left society life and the teaching of languages, devoted himself to exercises of piety and good works, and began to think of consecrating himself wholly to God. It was at this period that he came under the spell of the holy and learned Father Rosmini.

Father Rosmini was then at Rome striving to get the Rule of the Order, which he had founded the previous year (20th. February, 1928, at Mount Calvary, Domodossola), examined and approved by the Church. A friendship was formed between the two. Rosmini perceived in that soul a noble and delicate fire waiting the breath of God. Gentili, on his part, was fascinated by the superior energy and serene wisdom of Rosmini; he became attached to him as to one possessing in a high degree the qualities which he himself lacked; order, harmony, consistency in thought and action. He became a

disciple of Rosmini, and Rosmini sent him to Mount Calvary to make his novitiate under an inflexible discipline calculated to control an immoderate imagination, a romantic impulsiveness, a vague sentimentality.

His fellow-novices used to say – “The Father treats Gentili harshly because he knows all too well that he is holier than we are”. In fact Rosmini moulded Gentili’s character, perfecting his splendid gifts of nature and grace – his brilliant intelligence, his attractive personality, his intrepid faith and ardent zeal. These great gifts were now steadied by a seriousness of purpose, a balance of mind, a depth of spiritual culture, a habit of spiritual discernment, which ensured and made permanent the fruits of his apostolate.

Fr. Gentili ever remembered with loving attachment his years spent at Mount Calvary. In exchange for the deep spiritual lessons he learnt there, he left as a pledge of his love the pious exercise of alternately singing and preaching the Three Hours Agony on Good Friday. After all the years that have passed, this peculiarly Roman practice is still performed in that secluded corner of the Alps, the kindly mountain-folk still showing their attachment to the devotion brought there by Fr. Gentili from the Rome he loved so well.

ENGLISH MISSION

The Institute had not long been founded when Rosmini was invited from several quarters to send missionaries to England; and his choice fell at once on Gentili who had always shown an eager desire to labour for the conversion of that country. Now, early in 1835, the mission to England was decided upon, and Gentili was summoned from Mount Calvary to Rovereto to spend with Rosmini the months that were to pass before his departure. Rosmini was that year Archpriest of Rovereto, and a picture of the great philosopher as Pastor of souls is given by Gentili in a letter written to Calvary on January 16th.: "Here at Rovereto things are going on most prosperously. Father General is doing wonders and I assure you that in my estimation he is nothing less than a great saint. He is wearing himself out for his flock; in season and out of season he reproveth, entreatheth, rebuketh in all patience and doctrine; thus he heals animosities, removes scandals, brings sinners

to repentance. In a word his labours are unceasing". And on January 25th,; "Here conditions are everyday improving and God's blessings are being showered on this flock in a truly wonderful manner. Sinners are converted, scandals are removed, enmities are ended, sermons and instructions are innumerable. May God be thanked and blessed for all".

From Rovereto Gentili was sent to Rome, where he was received in special audience by Gregory XVI to whom he was already known, and who blessed him and his companions. Their English labours were to begin at Prior Park, near Bath, in the College-Seminary of Bishop Baines. They were invited to fill professorships in this college, Gentili being appointed President in the following year.

And so on June 16th. 1835, Gentili reached the shores of that island, whose religious reconstruction had long held a prominent place in his heart.

It was, perhaps, the thought of the sad state of souls in that island, which once had been known as our Lady's Dowry, that explains the gloomy tone of the letter in which Gentili describes his first impressions of London:

"We seemed to be really entering the city of Pluto: black houses, a black sky, black looking sailors, filthy to an extreme. The yellow black waters of the Thames emitted a highly offensive



ANTONIO ROSMINI-SERBATI (1797-1855) priest and philosopher of Rovereto, founder of the "Institute of Charity," and of "The Sisters of Providence." Pope Gregory XVI, when he approved the Constitutions of the Institute of Charity in 1839 with the Apostolic Letters "In sublimi," pronounced this weighty elogium of Rosmini (while he was still living): 'A man endowed with eminent genius; adorned with remarkable qualities of soul, illustrious in high degree for his knowledge in divine and human learning; renowned for his outstanding piety, religion, virtue, uprightness, prudence and integrity; a shining example of wonderful love for, and attachment to, the Catholic Religion and the Apostolic See.'

stench. On land confusion seemed everywhere to prevail. There were all manner of vehicles, men of every class and condition, women and girls dressed in unseemly fashion. In fine, here the devil reigns exercising a tyrannical sway over wretched mortals ”.

This description of London seems now exaggerated but it should be remembered that these were the years in which the English working classes had plumbed the depth of misery, ground down by a harsh industrialism, unrelieved by any measures of social reform.

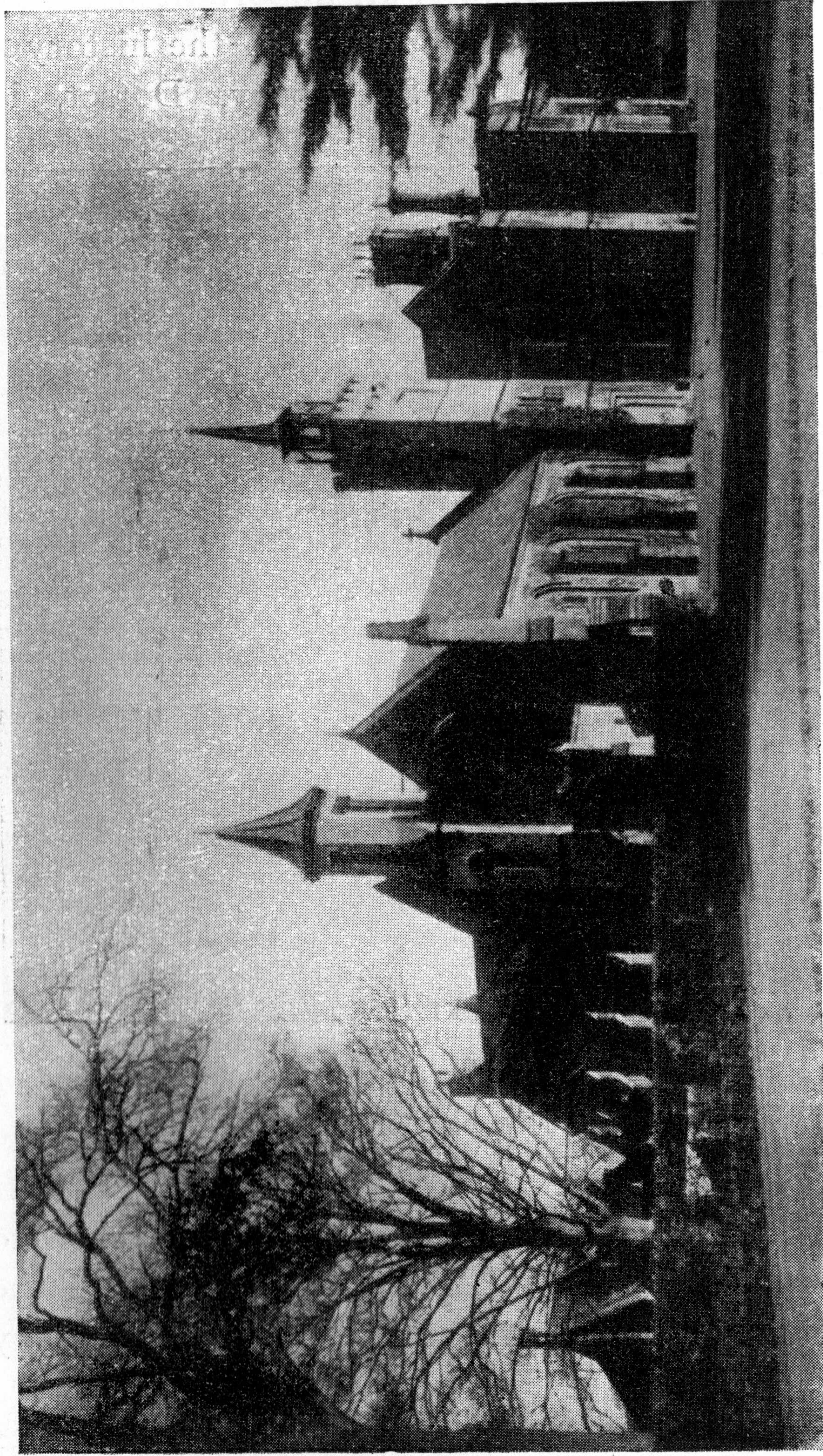
It was Rosmini's wish that Gentili and his companions should gradually accustom themselves to missionary work, properly so called. He was wise to see that they would be helped in this by being occupied for some years in the education of youth. He, therefore, bade them remain in the College at Bath. Little by little however the field of their activities was widening and the work of the missions began in earnest. This was especially so after Gentili's return from his last visit to Rome, whither Rosmini, having obtained the solemn approval of his Rule, had called him, in 1839, to take with him and a few others his vows as Presbyter of their Order. The vows were taken in the Catacombs of Saint Sebastian, and that ceremony was Gentili's last farewell to the Eternal City.

This same year 1839 is an important date not only in the life of Gentili but also in the history of English Catholicism. At Spetisbury, Dorset, in



St. Joseph's Altar at Grace Dieu.
(The first erected in his honour in England).

May of this year, to the congregation attached to St. Monica's Convent Chapel, Gentili preached the first regular mission ever conducted in England by



GRACE DIEU (now preparatory school for Ratcliffe College-Leicester).

the Fathers of Charity or other religious. And in 1840 at Grace Dieu, Leicestershire, while chaplain to Mr. Ambrose de Lisle, a name illustrious in the history of English Catholicism, he began a career that was to prove splendid before God and man.

DEVELOPMENTS

The work of the missions had a two-fold object; to organize Catholics scattered here and there throughout the country, recalling them to that fullness of Catholic life which had been impossible under the old penal laws, and to draw non-Catholics to the Church by making known to them Catholic Truth.

To attain these objects, Gentili laboured untiringly, with Loughborough as his centre up to 1845. Hundreds of conversions were brought about by him in these first years. And these conversions were lasting. Rosmini wrote to him, February 2nd. 1841, insisting on the solid spiritual formation of the new converts; — “ I desire that all, whom by God’s favour you receive, be well instructed and have a good intention and firm conviction: I desire that they should be like the converts of St. Francis Xavier who were known, as we read, by their virtue and perseverance ”. The fervent disciple gave heed

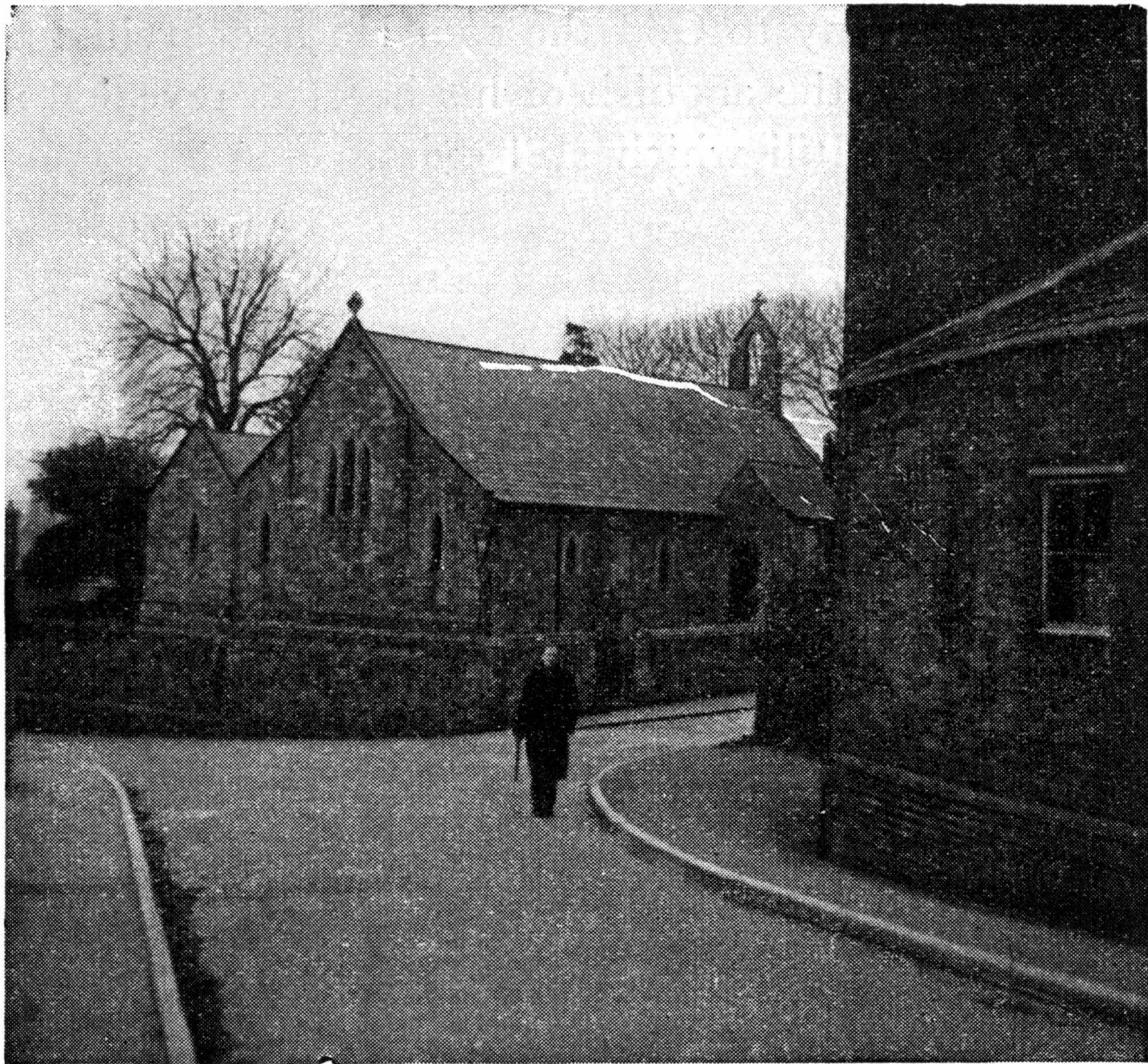
to the admonition of the master. Let one example, by way of proof, be sufficient.

The visitor to the little town of Shepshed, near Loughborough, cannot fail to be struck by the grateful memory that survives of Fr. Gentili in that parish of close on a thousand Catholics. It is a parish unique among Catholic parishes in England in that it is constituted entirely of descendants of Protestant converts of the district without that admixture of Irish emigrants who form a remarkable proportion of all the other Catholic parishes in Great Britain. The Catholics of Shepshed, edifying in their lives, are living witnesses to the efficacy of Gentili's teaching. It is touching to see the pride that they have in the fact that he was their evangelist; and they maintain the most devout and affectionate attachment not only to his memory and to the relics of him that they possess, but also to the pious practices which he introduced amongst them.

At Shepshed Fr. Gentili, from designs by Pugin, the great restorer of Gothic architecture in England, erected a small but beautiful country church. Later this had to be replaced by a larger one, which is now the parish church. But every year on the feast of Corpus Christi, the people go in procession to the smaller church which recalls memories of those great figures, the apostle and the artist, who stand, as it were, like two shining beacons, on the very

threshold of the history of their return to the true Church of Christ.

Gentili and Pugin were united in intimate spiri-



Shepshed. — The church erected by Pugin through Fr. Gentili's zeal.

tual friendship, and it was Gentili who inspired Pugin to a great sacrifice, — to renounce the love of a young lady, Mary Agnes Amherst, whose beauty

of soul had enraptured him. She was called by God to the more perfect life, and died among the Rosminian Sisters at Loughborough in the odour of sanctity. Pugin, sincere Christian that he was, would not deny to God the soul He had invited to Himself, but the anguish of his heart is revealed in letters to Gentili which still exist.

REVIVAL OF CATHOLIC FERVOUR

The little band of missionary pioneers in the Order had increased and were doing yeoman service preaching retreats and missions, revealing Catholic Faith and practice. A powerful auxiliary was the introduction of various pious practices which were unknown to Catholics in England, who in the years of Protestant fanaticism had been obliged to practise their religion almost by stealth. Again we quote Bishop Casartelli:

“The year 1843 will be forever memorable in English church history for the introduction into our spiritual life, by the Fathers of Charity, of four great and potent factors which have done so much to strengthen Catholic faith and piety. These four works – it may come as a surprise to some of my readers to learn, – were (1) The preaching of popular missions; (2) The ceremony of the Renewal of Baptismal Vows; (3) The Quarant’ Ore, or Forty Hours Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament; (4) The Devotions of the Month of May”.

Bishop Casartelli also mentions that another innovation, also owing to the Rosminian Fathers,

was the use of the Roman collar by the clergy. The Roman collar is now worn by clergymen of all denominations and even by Jewish rabbis,



Shepshed. — Window (Marked with cross) from which.
Fr. Gentili used to preach to the people.

and it is doubtless already forgotten that its use among the clergy was first introduced into England by the Rosminian Fathers.

Fr. Gentili's devotion to Our Lady was the devotion of a knight to his lady; warm and ever seeking to make known the glories of the beloved. In return his Lady conferred on him a singular privilege. It was in Coventry, the town once famous for its convents and its Corpus Christi Mystery Plays. In the seventeenth century the townpeople had substituted, instead of the plays, the procession, not very decent, of the legendary Lady Godiva.

Fr. Gentili announced from the pulpit: "They are having a procession in honour of their lady; we shall have one in honour of ours". And so the statue of Mary Immaculate was carried around the outside of the Church on three consecutive days, amid flowers and lights and accompanied by altar-boys and little girls dressed in white singing hymns. The Protestant onlookers were taken by surprise and, in spite of age-old bigotry, greatly impressed by a sight which seemed to them the emblem of heavenly purity and charity. The statue had been supplied by Mother Mary Margaret Hallahan, the foundress of the Third Order of Dominican Conventuals in England, a holy soul who, when she heard a few years later of the death of Fr. Gentili, exclaimed: "Our Lady cannot forget that he was the first to carry her in triumph through the streets of England".

OXFORD

Though Gentili and his companions loved to mix with the ordinary people, they did not on that account fall short in their duties of spiritual charity towards the more intellectual classes of society. They took a practical interest in the great religious movement which at that time was beginning to stir the country, and which is known as The Oxford Movement.

At Grace Dieu under the direction of Gentili a Protestant minister, named Wackerbath, a disciple of Pusey (the initiator of the Movement), entered the Catholic Church. At the same time Oxford men came to visit Phillips de Lisle at Grace Dieu, among them Dr. George Ward (father of the famous writer Wilfrid Ward), and thus Gentili came into contact with the Movement of which he, like many of his contemporaries, entertained high hopes. He gave Ward, Rosmini's "Maxims of Perfection", and Ward was so greatly impressed that he told

Gentili he had never found anything quite so beautiful or so edifying. At last, in 1842, Gentili visited Oxford in company with de Lisle and there met William Lockhart, who was with Newman at Littlemore, the small house in which Newman was hoping to revive monastic life within the Anglican Church.

Newman was then passing through one of the most anxious periods of his life. He still clung desperately to that "Via Media", by means of which he hoped to catholicize the Anglican Church without surrendering to Rome. What he dreaded most was coming to a decision. The only decision possible was to submit to the See of Peter, but this he found repugnant, for it seemed to spell the ruin of the whole Movement which he had fostered. He was profoundly English, and detested the very thought of anything which, to his fellows, might look "un-English": that his conversion to the Catholic Church would be so judged, he knew perfectly well. He was extremely sensitive on this point, though his victory over this prejudice, when he achieved it, was complete and lasting. Meantime he temporised in a strange state of mind. On one occasion Lockhart went to confession to him and suddenly asked him; "are you sure that you have faculties for hearing confessions?" and all Newman could answer was: "Ask Pusey".

Gentili arrived at Littlemore, wearing a Roman cassock, and was received with courtesy and affability. He found that the Community were using, at the devotions, a book which he himself had sent them, Rosmini's "Spiritual Exercises", a meditation book written on the model set by St. Ignatius. In their turmoil of doubts and hesitation, those who had entrusted themselves to Newman's care, at Littlemore, had promised to remain with him for three years without coming to any decision. Certainly, Newman little dreamt then that from this Roman priest, affable and sympathetic towards him, the stroke was to come that should force him to decide.

WILLIAM LOCKHART

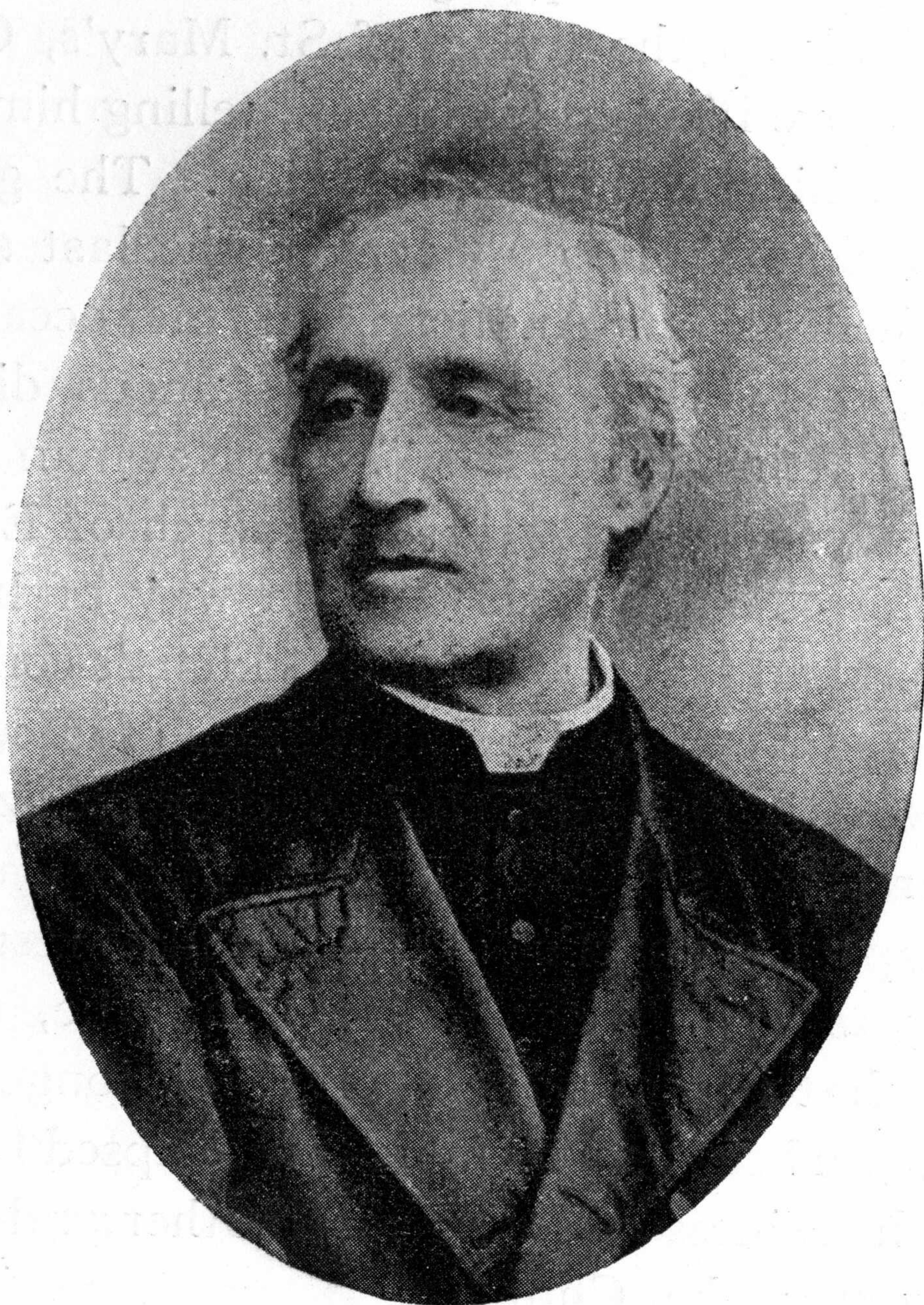
There lived with Newman two young men to whom he was very much attached, Dalgairns and William Lockhart. The latter was of noble Scottish birth, being descended from a laird, who in the 11th. century had married a princess of the O'Neills of Ulster. Long years afterwards, when he had given himself to the spiritual care of the Irish who had been forced to flee from their country after the Famine, and by whom he was styled "The Father of the Irish poor in London", he was given this piece of family history by the Princess of Casano, an Italian cousin, and he answered: "If my ancestress had been a milk-maid, I should have told my Irish friends of my link with Erin; but when there is question of an O'Neill, it would be like sounding one's own trumpet". He was also related to Sir Walter Scott.

Lockhart had formed a friendship with the future Cardinal Manning, at that time Anglican

Archdeacon of Chichester, who, though not in sympathy with Newman, had like tendencies towards Catholicism, and a similar premonition of having at some future time to take the plunge. Nevertheless, he advised his young friend to stay with Newman at Littlemore; and it was there that Lockhart met Gentili in 1842. In the following year he paid him a visit at Loughborough.

Lockhart had become restive under the restraint imposed upon him by his friends. What was the use of waiting when he saw quite clearly that the Catholic Church was the true Church of Christ? The promise that Newman had exacted from him did not hold in the face of the moral duty he had of recognizing in practice the Truth which had become evident to his mind. And so, in the clear, precise, and enlightened teaching that flowed from the lips of Gentili, he found peace of conscience; and on the 26th. August, he made his submission at Gentili's hand, at the same time requesting to be accepted as a Religious of the Institute of Charity. Undoubtedly this was the result, after the grace of God, of the attractive personality of Gentili, and, more especially, of that living spirituality which flowed from a countenance emaciated by work and penance. It was this that attracted Lockhart, who had been nauseated with the calm, easy-going lives of too many Anglican prebendaries.

His family took his conversion as a tragedy, and his mother, who was under the spiritual direction of Manning, broke off all relations with him. Mann-



Fr. Lockhart.

ing himself was horrified, saying that he would rather have followed his young friend to the grave than have seen him take such a step.

Newman felt pained that Lockhart had not mentioned the matter to him, and wrote complainingly to Gentili. Lockhart's conversion, Newman himself says in the "Apologia", made it impossible for him to keep the living of St. Mary's, Oxford, and so he gave it up to his bishop, telling him at the same time his reason for so doing. The grief he felt at Lockhart's loss appears in the last sermon, he preached as an Anglican, on the occasion of giving up his living. It was the famous discourse on "The Parting of Friends". So Newman severed his official connection with the Church of England: one of the chief obstacles in the way of his final submission had fallen. It was Lockhart's conversion that rescued Newman from that state of uncertainty and procrastination, which had characterized him for several years.

Perhaps Lockhart's step had like results for Manning as well. However that may be, the fact remains that he did not go on much longer in his old way, and before much more time elapsed Lockhart had the happiness of seeing his mother and his two friends enter the Church.

He himself not only followed Gentili in the religious state, but became, like him, a popular preacher. Together with Frs. Furlong, Rinolfi, Signini, and others of his Order, he was destined to continue Gentili's work in those "Missions to the People"

of which Bishop Casartelli speaks with so much warmth in the book we have already quoted. Later on he became Procurator General of his Order in Rome and was highly esteemed by Pope Leo XIII; and in 1884 his was one of the three names proposed to His Holiness in connection with the Primatial See of Scotland. But he begged to be left among his flock in London, and especially those Irish exiles to whose needs he had applied himself with loving energy.

He had the happiness of restoring to Catholic worship what is, perhaps, of the old consecrated churches which passed into Protestant hands at the " Reformation ", the only one to come back to its rightful owners. This is the church of St. Etheldreda, London; and it was his old friend and master, Manning, now Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, who erected it into a parish church and entrusted it to the care of the Rosminian Fathers. Here, in this old English church, Lockhart left a definite memorial of his zeal for the spiritual welfare of the Irish in London. The old crypt in the church of St. Etheldreda is dedicated to St. Brigid; and the furniture comes from an old chapel likewise under the patronage of St. Brigid, built by Irish people during the Famine years.

ITINERANT MISSIONARY

Returning to Gentili, we find that in 1845 Rosmini had freed him from all responsibilities that could interfere with the work of preaching. To this branch of Charity he gave himself with characteristic zeal and energy; conducting missions for the people, retreats for the clergy, for Religious and nuns, as well as preaching numerous sermons in aid of various charities. In order that the reader may form some idea of his work at this time, we give a list of his engagements for the year 1846: it may be taken as the measure of his work in other years. The long list comprises fifteen missions of fifteen days each (sometimes they ran into three weeks) at Sunderland, Durham, Breewood, St. Augustine's, Manchester, Newport, Hazelwood, Nottingham, Egton Bridge, Ugthorpe, Chelsea, Liverpool, Southwark, and three others at Manchester. Besides he gave eight Retreats; to priests, two in London and one in York; to Religious, to

the Poor Clares in York, the Rosminian Nuns at Loughborough, the Sisters of Mercy at Bermondsey, the Carmelites at Darlington, and the Sisters of the Good Shepherd at Hammersmith. The number of Protestants converted during the year reached five hundred. He preached as well occasional sermons in London, Manchester, Dublin and Waterford. In the midst of these numerous calls on his charity he found time to write a considerable number of letters of spiritual direction.

As years went on his fame as a preacher seemed to grow; he was in demand far and near. His vivid sincere eloquence, his penetrating glance afire with heavenly light, his whole aspect as a man of prayer and penance, drew the hearts of men. No one could look at him without seeing at once that he was a man of God. And so he journeyed unwearingly throughout England, going wherever he was called by the Bishops or parish priests, who saw in him the Apostle of a New Era.

ADVISER TO THE HOLY SEE

In the midst of these apostolic labours a difficult task was presented to him. For centuries the restoration of the Hierarchy in England, which had been disestablished under Elizabeth, had engaged the attention of the Holy See. In the year 1847, Cardinal Franzoni, Prefect of Propaganda, had written to Rosmini asking him if he could see his way to entrust an affair of grave moment for religion in England either to Fr. Gentili or to his fellow-religious, Fr. Pagani. Rosmini judged them both fitted for the task, and the Cardinal chose Gentili, at the same time requesting him to call on Pagani for advice. After continued meditation and prayer, Gentili threw himself into the task of drawing up about a dozen reports, full of statistics and particulars, giving the explanations sought, solving difficulties that had been raised, correcting misunderstandings and making practical suggestions. His twelve years of experience of the working of

ecclesiastical colleges and religious houses, of parishes in London and the provinces, as well as his wide acquaintance among the clergy, and personal contact with both priests and people stood him in good stead in this time of need. The restoration of the hierarchy was, to his mind, an urgent necessity. He strongly recommended that the existing vicariates should be divided into dioceses, grouped into several provinces under a Primate.

On the 25th. October and 27th. November 1847 and again on the 21st. January '48, Cardinal Franzoni wrote thanking Gentili for his reports and declaring himself satisfied therewith. They were placed in the hands of Pius IX to whom Gentili wrote with confidence, remembering the friendly meetings he had had with the Pontiff, when the latter was still Mgr. Mastai-Ferretti. The Pope's reply is interesting: the references to Hamilton are intended to allay any misgivings Gentili might have had lest the interference of governments, through their agents, might have an adverse influence on events. The letter is as follows:

Father Aloysius Gentili:

“Your letter, which you wrote from London has reached Us, and We assure you we have taken a lively interest in each of the reports sent

by you to the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda. We assure you, moreover, that we gave no mission to Mr. Hamilton, although we have received him on one or two occasions when he told Us, he had grave fears for religion in England.

“ We beg God that He may deign to bring His beloved designs to completion for the good of souls in the British Isles, and in this tender hope We impart to you and to your fellow-labourers in the vineyard of the Lord, Our Apostolic Benediction.

“ Given at Rome, at St. Mary Major's, the 14th. day of September, 1847, in the second year of Our Pontificate.

“ PIUS IX. POPE ”.

It is needless to add that three years later, in 1850, the English Hierarchy was restored, and that in 1911 the formation of three ecclesiastical Provinces brought into effect this further suggestion of Gentili's.

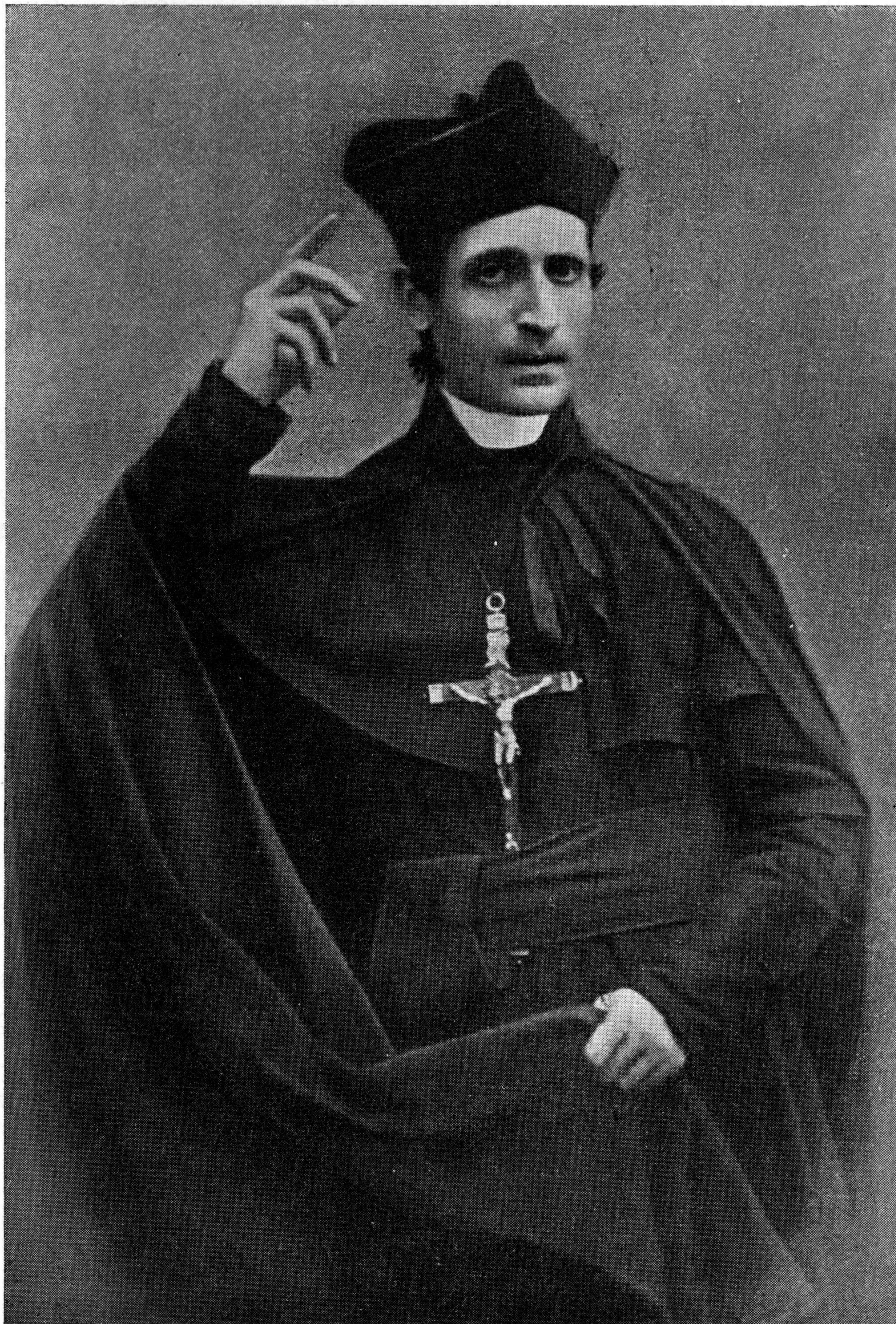
IRELAND

Catholic Ireland, with its history of three hundred years of harrowing persecution, naturally appealed to the heart of Fr. Gentili. The Penal Laws, which, we may note in passing, made the celebration of Holy Mass a crime punishable with death, though they failed in their attempt to bow a proud and Catholic nation, had left many an evil effect on Irish life. Centuries of fear had curtailed religious instruction and marred ordered worship, and proscribed all those practices of devotion whence a nation draws its spiritual strength. The Irish are endowed by God with a deep religious sense, and they longed for the untrammelled restoration of the full practices of the Faith. There were still great obstacles to the attainment of this end; obstacles both moral and spiritual. And then came the terrible Famine of '47: nothing could effectively arrest its ravages: the only thing was to appeal for funds to help the starving people.

Fr. Gentili threw himself into the task with loving energy. He made earnest appeals throughout England; and far away in sunny Italy, Fr. Rosmini wrote a beautiful letter to his subjects in England, in which, in words glowing with charity, he begged them to do all that was humanly possible for the relief of their afflicted brethren in Ireland. He went even further, and made a personal appeal, through the columns of the official government newspaper in Piedmont, and was thus enabled to send the then handsome sum of 7000 lire to the poor victims.

Fr. Gentili paid his first visit to this country in 1843. He came in response to a request made to him by the Christian Brothers and preached, in aid of their new schools, at the Jesuit church in Gardiner St. He spoke of the tribulations which for centuries the country had undergone on account of their religion, and how the people had manfully withstood them. He was listened to with reverence and emotion, and the appeal was a triumphant success. In his support of the Christian Brothers, the preacher thoroughly appreciated the important part that christian education should play in the spiritual regeneration of a country.

He was in Dublin on several occasions during the next few years. He came to love the city, for it reminded him of Naples, with its easily roused



Fr. Gentili preaching.

enthusiasm and its Faith. His visits gave him an opportunity of meeting the many Irish friends he had made while in Rome; perhaps, the most eminent among them was the famous sculptor, Hogan (1). Fr. Gentili had also sympathised with Fr. Mathew, the Apostle of Temperance, since his days in England, and had powerfully seconded the efforts of the great Capuchin, in his work for the moral progress of Ireland.

It was in April, 1848, that he started in Dublin the series of Missions of more than a month each, which was to end only with his death. He began at St. Audeon's, High St., then went to Rathmines in June. It is almost impossible to realize the extraordinary results of these protracted Missions; thousands were brought to a fuller appreciation of their dignity as Catholics, and, labouring in the

(1) "Hogan (born 1800) reached the Eternal City on Palm Sunday of 1824. Modest lodgings obtained, the pupil attended the schools of St. Luke, studied at the Vatican and Capitol, and modelled at the life accademies. His rather impoverished existence was comforted by the companionship of a lawyer, named signor Gentili, who taught him the Italian language. This gentleman became subsequently a popular priest and preacher in Dublin, and now sleeps near his friend under the shadow of O'Connell's Tower."

(Extract from an article entitled "*The Irish Canova*" — The works of John Hogan, in *The Irish Independent* April 13th, 1929 by Tomas S. Cuffe).

Confessional far into the night, he poured the balm of Christian consolation into many a weary heart.

During the summer he gave a Retreat to the Sisters of Mercy at Birr, and then returned a second time to Rathmines to preach in aid of the new schools in that parish. No appeal on behalf of the Christian education of youth ever passed him by unheeded.

THE SUPREME SACRIFICE

It was the whole-hearted response of the people of Dublin which made him throw himself with ever increasing zeal into those labours in the pulpit and the confessional which were to shorten his life. His apostolic heart glowed with thanksgiving and enthusiasm at seeing before his very eyes the extraordinary renewal of christian life effected among a generous and believing people. At the end of August, he went to preach in St. John's, the Augustinian Church, Dublin, in a district then one of the most unhealthy in the city. "That terrible place will kill you", a kind lady remarked to him; "And are there not souls to be saved in the terrible places as well as in the pleasant ones?", he answered.

While here he got a letter from Italy which must have made him live again, if only for a few fleeting moments, in the land of his birth. In Italy too, there were great movements, hopes,

disillusionment, wars and rumours of wars. In the midst of his work for the salvation of souls Gentili saw all those tragic events with the eyes of one who looks on what is eternal. All this too must be turned to the service of God and the good of souls. But how many look on things from that standpoint and direct all their energies even in political movements to that end?

This was certainly Rosmini's thought when he wrote from Rome telling his illustrious disciple, Gentili, that he had been commanded by Pius IX to prepare himself for the Cardinalate and asking him for his vote on whether or not he should accept this fresh burden. Visions of the Rome of his youth, with its majestic religious ceremonies, must have passed before Gentili's eyes as he prepared to reply; but beyond those glories he saw another light. He wrote:

Dublin, 5th September 1848.

“Dearly beloved Father General and Superior in Jesus Christ, the glory of whose Kingdom we seek alone in all things. Amen.

“I forward an immediate reply to the order sent me by your Paternity. I not only counsel your Reverence to accept the dignity which the Vicar of Christ wishes to confer upon you, but, since you moreover ask a direct precept, I send you

one of the most express kind. Indeed, if it be allowed me, I command you in virtue of holy Obedience. In this matter the Lord has heard my constant prayer. I hope now with a yet greater hope that He will give ear to some more important requests of mine which I make not in consideration for you personally (for that would be merely human, and something for which you care not at all) but for love of the poor Spouse of Christ crucified, everywhere like Him crucified and wounded. Receive then, my dear Father, the Sacred Purple, but do you remember on that day the purple that was placed in mockery on the bruised shoulders of the King of Heaven, and how it was bathed in the blood of the Man-God; and do you offer again, unto the Eternal Father, your blood in union with His most Precious Blood, whence Holy Church took its rise. Thus will the wisdom given to you from heaven redound to the true glory of God.

“ I am giving a third Mission here with Father Furlong. The Lord has opened to us a new field greater and more fruitful than England. We shall easily get a church and house now being built in this city. I have suggested to several bishops that they put the whole Island under the protection of Mary Immaculate, and perhaps the suggestion will bear fruit, for it already has the approval of three out of the four Archbishops: the fourth has

not yet been approached, but it is hoped that he, too, will approve. Should this come about I am sure a new dawn will break for this poor afflicted land. . . ”.

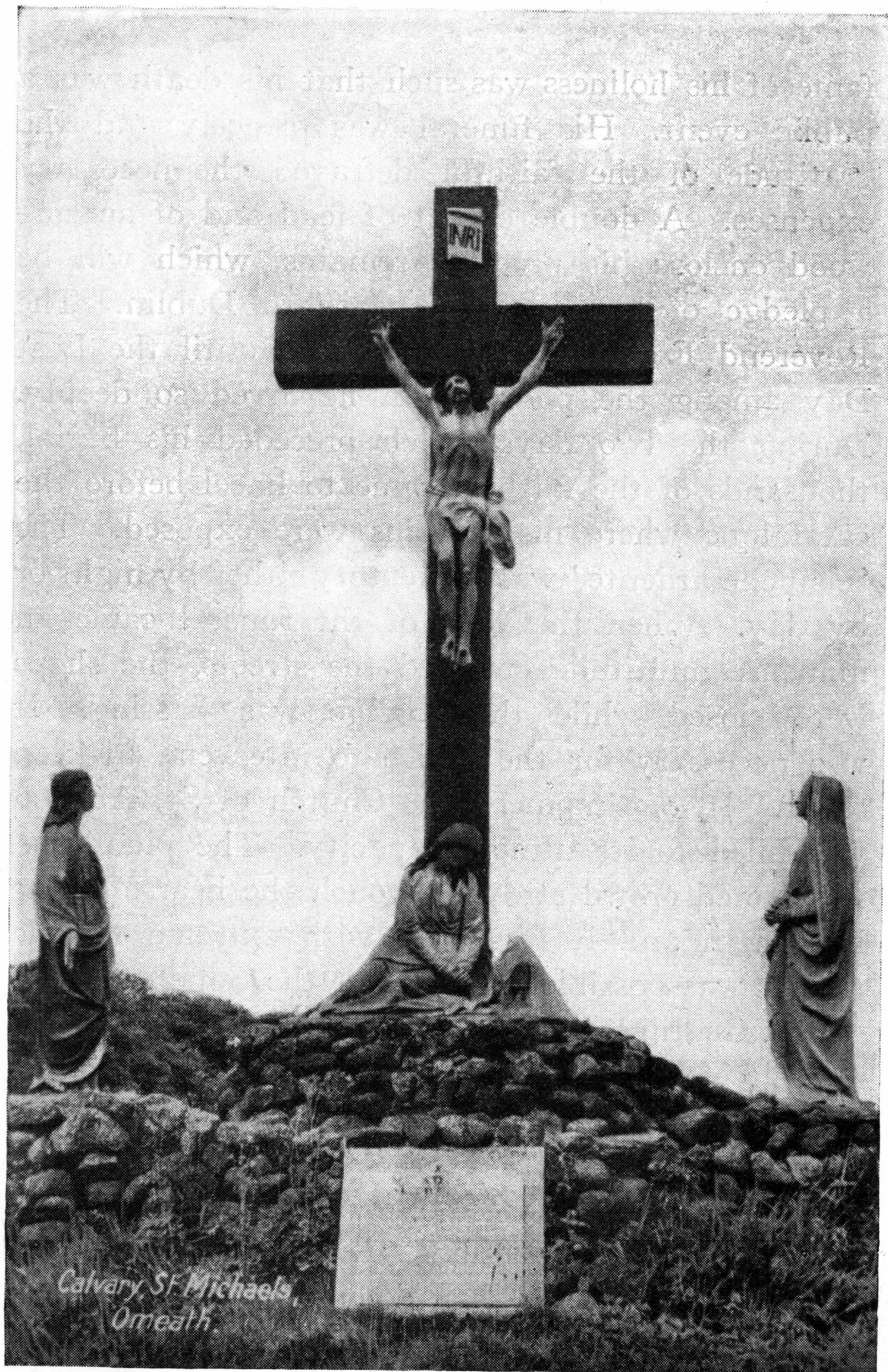
But a new dawn was breaking for him too. During the third week of the Mission he caught the fever; on the 26th. September, he was dead.

All Dublin went into mourning. The ceremonies of O'Connell's funeral were renewed; and the great bell that had been silent since the death of the Liberator, tolled now for him. In loving veneration the people crowded around his bier, and appointed him a tomb near O'Connell's. The journals and papers of the day were filled with splendid commendations of the great and holy man who had passed away so tragically in the very midst of his labours and his success. It would be quite impossible to quote all or even a few of the articles which spoke in sorrowful praise and deep appreciation of the life and character and the greatness of him who had gone. We may however quote some part at least of an article, taken in substance from the "Freeman's Journal," which appeared in the "Giornale Romano", 26th. October, 1848:

"Ireland was the scene of the last Apostolic work of Father Gentili, and he had there roused intense admiration for his gifts. He was stricken by a deadly fever in the very confessional. . . The

fame of his holiness was such that his death was a public event. His funeral was princely and the gratitude of the faithful defrayed the necessary expenses. A double casket of lead and of acacia-wood enclose his precious remains, which will be a pledge of blessing and peace to Dublin. The Reverend Father Gentili will sleep until the Last Day among the poor whom he loved so deeply. During the two days which preceded his burial, thousands of the faithful came to kneel before the catafalque where his remains were exposed. The 'chapelle ardente' was not empty either by night or by day. When the time of the funeral came an immense multitude crowded the streets, the shops were closed while the cortège was passing. It was necessary for the police to intervene to keep order. In one moment the Church of St. Audeon was filled to its utmost capacity. The pious and recollected crowd strove to touch the hearse of the holy man and it was only with extreme trouble that it was possible to arrive at the cemetery. . . .".

Fr. Gentili lay buried in Glasnevin, in the O'Connell Circle, until July 21. 1938, when he was transferred to Omeath, Co. Louth, to the House of Studies of the Irish Province of the Institute of Charity. The young Religious, who are there maturing their vocation for the Missions, will draw inspiration from the tomb of this Apostolic man and an



The Calvary, Omeath.

understanding of the sacrifices that the missionary life entails. The House at Omeath, which stands on the lovely shores of Carlingford Lough, has been for many years a place of pious pilgrimage on account of the Stations of the Cross which attract the devotion of the people. These Stations culminate in a fine devotional Calvary, brought thither from the Orphanage at Sainghin, in France, which the Rosminians held until its enforced closing by the anticlerical laws of the beginning of this century. Near that Calvary the remains of Fr. Gentili will find a resting-place and will speak to the pious pilgrim of the apostolate for souls.



The Tomb of Fr. Gentili at Omeath.